

[Mrs. Gladys Turberg]

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1 [Turberg?]

Mrs. Gladys Turberg, of North Main Street, Thomaston, is the daughter of a Sheffield knifemaker, worked in the American Shear and Knife factory in Woodbury as a young girl, and later in the Thomaston Knife factory on Waterbury road. Her mother, Mrs. Maitland, who lives with Mrs. Turberg, spent her girlhood in Sheffield and her father and grandfather were knifemakers. The old lady listens eagerly to the conversation, occasionally interpolating remarks which her accent and complete toothlessness render difficult of interpretation. Mrs. Turberg: Conn. [1938-9?]

"I did what they called etching. On the blades you know. I worked at it in Woodbury and then I came over here and worked. But I had to give it up on account of the fumes. You worked with cyanide of potassium and it wasn't very pleasant. My throat used to get raw. The doctor made me give it up. They brought in a woman from Bridgeport to teach me the trade while we were in Woodbury, and she spent a month up at the factory with me before I got onto it sufficiently so she thought I could do it without further help. And then we came to Thomaston. When was it we came to Thomaston, Ma?"

Mrs. Maitland: "Goin' an fur twenty-five year."

Mrs. Turberg: "Yes, nearly twenty five years ago. And we'd spent ten years in Woodbury. Yes, I was kind of brought up in the knifemaking business."

Mrs. Maitland: "And your father and mother before ye."

Mrs. Turberg: "When I was quite a small girl, over in Woodbury, I used to have to go to the factory of a Saturday 2 morning and pump the bellows for my father. My brother Leonard

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was supposed to do it, but he generally managed to be not feeling well on Saturday morning. And believe me, my arm used to ache.”

Mrs. Maitland: “Didn't hurt ye. I used to do it m'self when I were a little girl. Used to take my dad his tea, I did, when he worked till eight or nine o'clock every night. What you'd call supper.”

Mrs. Turberg: “I can remember father tellin' about how he used to work when he was a little boy. He said he used to have to hold the blades with a tongs while grandfather forged them. And they'd work by candle light. And my father would take a hot blade from the fire while grandfather wasn't lookin' and press it against the candle so's to make it melt faster. Because when the candle went out, they'd stop workin'.”

Mrs. Maitland: “My 'usband were a blade forger, and 'is father before 'im.”

Mrs. Turberg: “He went up to New York state to work, once, in one of the factories up there. You know they used to go from one place to another quite a bit. But he didn't stay there a week. They did cheap work, he said. They were awful fussy about the work, those older men. It used to be a treat to watch old Jack Fox, I can see him yet, with his stiff finger stickin' up in the air, openin' and shuttin' a knife, and squintin' at it through his glasses. And the old hand drill he used to use. Looked like a fiddle. ‘Has tha got thy dancin' shoes, Gladys?’ he used to say. ‘Ah's goin' to diffle today, lass.’

Mrs. Maitland: “Fiddlin' is what they called it.”

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Mrs. Turberg: “Too bad you couldn't talk to old Jack. He died last winter. We had an errand boy named Ricky Taylor at the shop. He went down to the shore one time and had some clam chowder, first he'd ever had, and he came in next day and told Jack about it. ‘sr. Fox,’ he says, ‘is it true that you sometimes find pearls in it.’ ‘Pearls, is it’ says Jack. ‘Lad, tha's lucky if tha finds class in it.’

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Mrs. Maitland: "I knowed Jack well."

Mrs. Turberg: "And he knew our family. You see, a couple of my uncles had come over here years ago and gone back to Sheffield. Then our family came over, and though we never knew it before, we found out our uncles had worked right around this section. They'd worked in Woodbury and they'd worked at Reynolds Bridge. Mr. Scovill over in Woodbury used to say to Len, 'tha's a bold, brazen bugger, just like thy uncle, Leonard.'

"The factory in Woodbury burned down and they never built it up again. Some of them went to Winsted, some went to New Britain and Bridgeport and some came here to Thomaston. This place was never the same after Clark got hold of it either. Clark put a lad in to manage for him, his name was Wheeler and every body hated him. Called him 'Creepin' Jesus,' if you'll excuse the expression. He used to wear rubber soled shoes and sneak around so nice and quiet. There was a girl named Julie Balch, she used to just despise him. She was workin' away one day and she got to talkin' about him and there he was right in back of her. 'If I had him here,' she says, 'I'd give him a 4 piece of my mind,' and she went on at a great rate. We tried to stop her, but she thought we was egg'in' her on. Finally Wheeler says, 'All right Miss Balch if that's the way you think of me, you can go home and tell your mother about it.' Fired her right off. She felt terrible. And so did we, but there wasn't anything we could do about it of course.

Mrs. Maitland: "Yer father would've known what to do about it, and so would any of t'others.'

Mrs. Turberg: "Well, Ma, you couldn't be quite so independent all the time, if you wanted to hold your job. There were quite a few of the older men workin' there, but they weren't so independent, toward the last."